DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 166 689 CS 204 452

AUTHOR Dimmick, John W.
TITLE Levels of Analysis in Mass Media Decision-Making: A Taxonomy and Research Strategy.
PUB DATE Aug 78
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (61st, Seattle, Washington, August 13-16, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Influence; *Decision Making; Interaction; *Journalism; *Mass Media; Media Research; News Media; News Reporting; *Organizational Communication; *Research Methodology; Research Needs; *Social Influences; Taxonomy

ABSTRACT

A taxonomy of levels of analysis in mass media decision making is presented in this paper, and a strategy is proposed for incorporating the different levels into the design of research. Following a clarification of the concept of influence and its relationship to the levels of analysis used in the taxonomic structure, the paper describes the following eight hierarchical levels, ordered from the molar or societal level to the molecular or individual level: societal level influences, industry level or interorganizational relations, supraorganizational influences, community or market influences, intraorganizational influences, formal or informal group influences, the influence of dyadic communication, and intraindividual or cognitive level criteria. It then argues for combining several levels in the design of research, points out the necessity of questioning whether normative social influence operates to constrain decision making in a particular situation, and outlines a procedure that involves taking each pair of adjacent levels in the hierarchy and questioning whether normative influence operates between levels in such a way that decision making at the lower level is constrained. It also points to a promising procedure for engaging in an active search for between-level influences. (GT)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED166689

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Theory and Methodology Division

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS IN MASS MEDIA DECISION-MAKING

A TAXONOMY AND RESEARCH STRATEGY

By

John W. Dimmick
Assistant Professor

Department of Communication
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio 43210
(614) 422-3400

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

John W. Dimmick

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Presented to the Theory and Methodology Division, Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Seattle, Washington, August, 1978.

CS204452

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank his colleagues, especially Thomas McCain, Ellen Wartella, and Joseph Pilotta, who read and commented on earlier drafts of the paper.

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS IN MASS MEDIA DECISION-MAKING

A TAXONOMY AND RESEARCH STRATEGY

In the eighteen years since the publication of White's (56) original gatekeeper study, there has been an increasing awareness of the complexity of decision-making in mass communication. The focus has shifted from a molecular emphasis on individual psychology, as in White's study, to an awareness of the importance of employing more molar levels of analysis. For example, in a case study of decision-making in television network news, Bailey and Lichty conclude that, "The organization was the gatekeeper" (4, p. 229). Even larger levels of analysis are apparent in Gerbner's use of the term "message system" (28) in DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach's (15) "production subsystem" and in Donohue, Tichenor and Olien's "mass media systems" (19). Despite the differences in approach of these researchers, their common use of the word "system" serves to index a recognition of the complexity of decision-making in the mass media.

The usual definition of a system emphasizes the inter-relatedness and inter-dependence among the system components (35). Unfortunately, the ability to engage in research on a system and explain its behavior is negatively related to the system's complexity. In order to make the study of complex systems an intellectually tractable task, it is necessary to find some method of organizing the complexity. The crucial question, as formulated by McPhee, is ". . . how to have our complexity and analyze it too?" (40, p. 8). In searching for an organizing principle in media decision-making processes, we may make use of Herbert Simon's observation that complexity is often manifested in the form of hierarchy (48, p. 87).

A hierarchic system, as defined by Simon, is composed of subsystems organized in a hierarchial manner. McPhee expressed a similar idea when he wrote that ". . . big systems are no longer treated as primary units but as configurations of (lesser) primary units" (40, p. 16). Simon shows that while the concept of hierarchic structure is abstract and general, hierarchic systems in such diverse areas as chemistry, history, biology, and human symbol and social systems share properties in common. My purpose here is to employ the concept of hierarchic structure in formulating a taxonomy of research areas in mass-media decision-making and to propose a strategy for incorporating different levels of analysis into the design of research.

The taxonomy presented in the following pages explicitly utilizes the concept of hierarchy by ordering the system levels from the most molar or societal level to the molecular or individual level of decision-making. At each of the eight levels in the hierarchy, extant research will be reviewed briefly to demonstrate the influence exerted at the level of that particular subsystem. The taxonomy aims at being relatively exhaustive or complete in specifying levels, but it is necessarily incomplete in cataloging variables within each level.

The media decision-making system is hierarchic not only in the sense that the unit of analysis increases in size as one ascends the hierarchy, and vice versa, but is also hierarchic in the sense that decisions made at one level may influence or place constraints on decision-makers at the lower levels of the system. The levels higher in the hierarchy constitute the environment -- or rather environments -- in which media decision-makers operate. This conceptualization does

not ignore the fact that decision units located at the lower levels may exercise influence at the more molar levels. For example, industries -- through their trade associations -- may attempt to influence legislation or rule-making by regulatory bodies on issues affecting their interests. Likewise, organizational sub-units may negotiate agreements with firm management and individuals may bargain with their immediate superiors. Once decisions are made, however, the legislation, the rules, policies or informal agreements have the effect of influencing or constraining behavior. The taxonomic structure is an explicit acknowledgement that while decisions concerning media content are made by individual gatekeepers acting in sequence and by interacting groups of gatekeepers in an organizational setting, the parameters of the decision process and the very structure of the organization are shaped by influences operating at more molar levels, such as the industry in which the organization operates, and at the level of the society itself.

Before presenting the taxonomy, however, it is necessary to clarify the concept of influence and its relationship to the levels of analysis used in the taxonomic structure. Simon (48) uses the term "hierarchy" in two distinct ways -- in the formal sense denoted by an organizational chart and in the sense of an informal hierarchy such as the sociometric mapping of interaction patterns. Both uses of the term imply an influence process whether the influence resides in the formal superior-subordinate relationship or in the less formal inter-influence process which occurs among people who interact across time. The term "influence" must include both kinds of hierarchial relationships and their interaction.

As King (34) has shown, social influence is not reducible to such

concepts as power or causation. He differentiates between informational social influence and normative social influence. Informational social influence occurs when individuals accept information from another as evidence about reality in order to reduce their uncertainty. "Informational social influence is influence which occurs when the recipient uses the behavior of others to assist him in arriving at a decision" (34, p. 22). In this form of influence, the source of the information is not conceived as consciously attempting to influence behavior. In contrast, normative social influence is usually the result of conscious attempts to influence behavior, i.e., the source is attempting to influence others. "Normative social influence is influence which occurs when the receiver accepts influence in order to gain some desired goal" (34, p. 22). These two concepts provide further specification of the ways in which Simon uses the concept of hierarchy. Distinguishing informational from normative social influence enables us to distinguish influence which occurs between levels of analysis from influences that operate within levels. Informational social influence is typical of influences within levels, while normative social influence is characteristic of influences which operate between levels of analysis. For example, informational influence is apparent within the news industry when the television network news departments or newspaper editors use the New York Times (13, 55, 4) as a guide to which events are newsworthy. Normative influence is apparent between levels when the executives of broadcast stations accept the edicts of the FCC at the societal level in order to preserve their licenses and livelihood.

Levels of Analysis in Media Decision-Making

Level 1: Societal Level Influences

At this, the most molar level of analysis, one can ask: how does the society define and constrain the activities of its mass communication institutions and specialists?

Here, the most important questions pertain to the legal definitions of the media in society and to the allocation of resources to the media. In the legal realm, the power vulnerability of media industries -- their relative susceptibility to government influence -- affects the elaborateness and explicitness of the codes of these industries (16). The importance of economics is demonstrated by what McCombs calls the Principle of Relative Constancy (39). The Constancy Principle states that the level of spending by consumers and advertisers is highly related to some overall indicator of the economy such as the GNP. One implication of constancy is that since the amount of money allocated to the media as a whole is fixed, media industries play a zero sum game: new media industries succeed at the expense of the older media.

Level 2: Industry Level or Interorganizational Relations

Here, the basic question becomes: how does the industry system in which media organizations exits shape decision processes?

The term "industry system" is used here to mean both the set of competing organizations (e.g., the three television networks) and the relationship of these competing firms to/other organizations (e.g., advertisers, program suppliers and affiliated stations).

The influence of competing firms on each other is demonstrated by

Dominick and Pearce's (17) study of trends in network television. Their study shows that, as in other cases of oligopolistic competition, program diversity has decreased markedly over the history of the medium. In addition, competing firms within the same industry tend to have similar decision structures and similar ways of doing business (29, 44, 40).

The importance of other organizations, aside from competitors, is indicated by Gerbner's (28) institutional approach to decision-making and by Hirsch's (29) use of the concept organization set: both focus attention on the importance of inter-organizational relationships. For example, Turow found differences between firms which publish children's books for the mass market and those which publish for the library market. Apparently, these firms have evolved different organizational structures as a result of their relationship with different clients (librarians vs. buyers for bookstores) even though the ultimate audience -- children -- is ostensibly the same (53).

Finally, the technologies which industries share and the state of that technology at any particular time has a projound effect on decision-making patterns. Currently, technological changes in both the television industry (7) and daily newspapers (2) are fomenting changes in organizational behavior. In newspapers, computer technology is enabling a greater centralization of decision-making, while in television new video technology is changing decision-making patterns in the entire industry.

Level 3: Supra-Organizational Influences

Since it has been estimated that two-thirds of the news personnel in the country work for organizations tied to newspaper chains or broadcast groups or networks (33) it is important to ask: what are the

constraints imposed on an organization's gatekeepers by virtue of their ownership or control by media conglomerates, broadcast chains or newspaper groups? These constraints may pertain to policies which directly affect media content or may be related to other organizational matters such as personnel policies or pricing decisions (ad rates).

The widespread ownership and control of media organizations (42, 3, 2) points to the importance of the relationship between individual organizations and higher-level decision units. The influence of supra-organizational management may be restricted, as one case study of a broadcast group demonstrated, largely to financial matters with a great deal of latitude in other decisions delegated to local management (31). Other studies (54) indicate that organizations controlled by the same management structure purvey quite similar content or that significant changes in content may be wrought when a chain acquires ownership of a newspaper (51, 23). The existence and scope of supra-organizational policies, or other kinds of participation in decision-making, are a measure of the autonomy or discretion in decision-making: they define the degrees of freedom of decision makers in local markets or communities.

Level 4: Community or Market Influences

The general question here focuses on the influence exerted on gatekeepers by the community or market in which they enact their roles and by the behavior of other media organizations within the market.

Organizational policy, for example, may be influenced by the fact that media executives (41, 18, 21, 20) are integrated into the community power structure. Likewise, the definitions of news held by lower level gatekeepers may be affected by their integration into the community (30).

Attributes of the community such as market size affect how conflict is handled by the press (19) and the frequency of publisher interference in newsroom decisions (6). Other market variables affecting content include such factors as the degree of competition among media organizations (50).

In addition, the content of the other media organizations in the market may be influential. Studies by Buckalew (10) and Liebes (36) indicate that within a community the content of newspapers may influence the content of radio news and vice versa.

Level 5: Intra-Organizational Influences

At the level of the organization, the general question asks how gatekeepers' decisions are shaped by organizational variables? The important sets of influences are organizational policy, organizational structure and goals, and the political process within the organization.

Breed (8) was perhaps the first to point out the importance of policy in shaping gatekeepers' decisions. While he conceived policy as a negative influence on the flow of information, policy is more generally and usefully conceived (in light of such positive aspects of organizational policy as the use of background boxes in daily newspapers) as the organization's attempt to define its "product."

A second important set of influences concerns how the organization is structured to accomplish its tasks -- how decision-making roles and functions are defined and how these decision-roles are coordinated by higher-level gatekeepers, the organization's executives. Warner (55) and Epstein (22), for example, have provided such descriptions of the news departments in the TV networks.

A related question asks what are the goals or criterion variables

on which the organization assesses its performance in economic ways. For example, in television each network aspires to a thirty percent audience share in each time period. The audience-share goal is instrumental in attaining a market-share goal of thirty percent or one-third of advertising billings in network television. In the same industry, non-economic goals include such aims as airing programs with "prestige" and "looking first-class" (9).

Within the organization, debates over goals and competition for scarce resources -- air time or space in the paper, money, or personnel -- occurs along departmental or sub-unit lines and figures prominently in decisions concerning media content. Blumler (5) and Burns (11) have described such conflicts in the BBC, and Sigal (47) found competition among the desks for page-one placement of stories in two leading American papers. Debates over goals and competition for resources is such a regular and recurring feature of organizations that Cyert and March have characterized organizations as political coalitions and the executives as political brokers (14).

Level 6: Formal or Informal Group Influences

What are the influences on media content which derive from the interaction of gatekeepers in formal or informal groups?

Brown, for example, has described the formal negotiation of a network prime-time schedule by executives from several network departments (9). Similarly, Sigal analyzed the meetings of editors on two major newspapers which are held to decide the journalistically crucial matter of which stories will receive page-one play (47). In both cases, media content was not determined simply by executive fiat but was decided in the give-and-take of group discussion.

Media content is also influenced by less formalized interaction among groups of gatekeepers. Studies by Dunn (20) and Grey (26) of reporters who cover the same "beat," for example, have shown that an inter-influence process leads to a similarity of news judgment among reporters. Crouse, observing the same phenomenon on the campaign trail uses the epithets "pack" or "herd journalism" to describe what is otherwise a classic depiction of the process of creating social reality in a group context (13).

Level 7: The Influence of Dyadic Communication

What are the influences on gatekeepers' decision-making which are attributable to face-to-face contact with other individuals?

Tuchman, for example, found that the substance of the on-camera conversation between the talk show host and his guest stars is negotiated in a pre-interview between the guest star and a member of the television talk-show staff (52).

One important source of influence on media content at the level of the dyad is the relationship between reporters and their news sources. Studies by Chibnall (12), Gieber (27), and Dunn (20) demonstrate the impact of this form of interaction on newspaper content.

Level 8: Intra-individual or Cognitive Level

How do individual gatekeepers make decisions concerning media content? What are the criteria or dimensions of choice which gatekeepers use to evaluate potential media content (e.g., "pilot" programs or news copy). If more than a single dimension is involved, the question of the decision models used to combine or weight the dimensions is relevant. In addition, it is important to ask whether the dimensions of choice and

the decision models employed by gatekeepers vary from situation to situation and how they change over time. Studies by White (56), Snider (49), and Flegel and Chaffee (24) have documented the importance of individual criteria in media decision-making.

The eight levels of analysis which comprise the taxonomy are quite general--they apply to the media decision system as a whole. The taxonomy should not be construed to mean that influence will operate both within and between levels in all media decision situations. The question of determining which levels are influencing decision-making will be addressed in later sections of the paper. Since treating both normative and informational influence is beyond the scope of this paper, the following pages will be devoted, in large part, to normative social influence.

Before proceeding, however, it should be noted that the taxonomy might be useful as a method of indicating the extent of our knowledge of media decision-making. If a matrix were constructed in which the columns represented the various media and the rows the eight levels of analysis, the extant research literature could be classified accordingly. The empty cells and those containing small numbers of studies would indicate the gaps in our knowledge and provide a guide for further research.

The Practicability of Multi-Level Research

One major implication of the taxonomic structure presented in the preceding pages is that since influences on decision-making may operate at several different levels of analysis, it is important to combine several levels in the design of research. This seems to be the lesson of Argyris's (1) attempt to improve the effectiveness of a daily metro-

politan newspaper. One possible reason for the failure of Argyris's intervention is his focus on a single level of analysis--the interpersonal level. As Lorsch and Morse (37) have empirically demonstrated, accounting for the effectiveness of an organization requires measurement of variables at three levels--the environment in which the organization functions, the members of the organization and the organization itself. Thus, Argyris's intervention attempt may have failed because it was confined to a single level of analysis.

The idea, however, that social research may be conducted at several levels of analysis is not universally accepted. Galtung's (25) typology of levels of analysis, if accepted, would severely restrict the ability to conduct multi-level research. To Galtung, the basis of social research is face-to-face interaction and the individual is the basic unit from which larger units of analysis are formed. He defines a typology consisting of 3 levels: primary, secondary and tertiary collectivities. The primary collectivity is exemplified by the group in which all individuals or elements are strongly connected. Secondary collectivities or systems are composed of elements which are connected, but only weakly connected. The tertiary level is composed of categories (e.g., persons of the same age) in which the elements are unrelated. The strength of the relationship among the elements declines in strength as one moves from the primary through the tertiary levels. Galtung argues that once one reaches the tertiary level there is no interaction occurring and, hence, no possibility of forming meaningful units beyond the secondary collectivities.

Galtung provides no rationale or justification, however, for the a priori choice of the "group," "system" and "category" as the elements of the typology. Further, no rationale or empirical evidence is adduced to

justify the assertion that the relationships between elements necessarily weaken at the system level and disappear entirely at the level of the category. Beyond pointing out these deficiencies, little else can be said concerning these aspects of Galtung's typology: unstated arguments are peculiarly invulnerable to criticism.

It is possible, however, to show that Galtung's central assumption--the necessity for face-to-face contact--is unduly and unnecessarily restrictive. Influence, the core concept in the taxonomic structure presented earlier, can occur despite the lack of face-to-face contact between decision-makers. Both normative and informational social influence may take place in the absence of actual interaction. Broadcast station managers conform to FCC rules without every speaking to a single member of the Commission and the New York Times exercises its influence on the news judgments of far more gatekeepers than even the Times large staff could possibly encounter face-to-face. In light of these considerations, Galtung's attempt to restrict research to the micro-levels does not seem to be a serious impediment to conducting research on media decision-making at more molar levels.

Between Level Constraints: Normative Social Influence

The argument that gatekeeping behavior should be studied at several levels of analysis is vulnerable, however, to the counter-argument that proliferating levels of analysis in a single research design leads us back in the direction of more complexity than is analytically tractable. The taxonomic structure organizes and stratifies the complexity but does not, in itself, make the analytic task appreciably more manageable. What is required is the ability to distinguish between those instances where

more molar levels of analysis are relevant from those in which the influence exerted higher in the system is not a factor. In other words, it is necessary to pose the question of whether normative social influence operates to constrain decision-making in a particular situation.

The fact that this question has not been consistently raised is clearly demonstrated by research conducted by one school of organizational theory. Hirsch (30) criticized this research tradition for taking the small group as the unit of analysis and treating the organization as a more or less unrelated set of decision-making groups unconnected to each other, to the organizational hierarchy, or to the organization's environment. While, as Simon (48) shows, departmental boundaries "insulate" groups from each other, these groups are not totally independent. In news organizations, for example, normative social influence in the form of the news policy constrains decision-making on policy-related stories but does not exercise a similar effect on policy-irrelevant news items. On non-policy related stories what Cyert and March (14) have called local rationality prevails--an organizational sub-unit is left alone to accomplish its task. For example, on daily newspapers each sub-unit such as the national or city desk fills its own "news hole" (page one and policy-related stories excepted) without reference to the organizational hierarchy.

At the societal level, the differential exercise of normative social influence by the society on industry systems can be demonstrated by contrasting the newspaper industry and broadcasting. As an industry, newspapers are insulated from government control by the First Amendment. Ostensibly, broadcasting is also protected from censorship by the Communications Act of 1934. However, the broadcast industry is susceptible to government influence because stations are licensed by the FCC.

This susceptibility has been demonstrated by research on the news departments of the television networks. Warner found that one major responsibility of the executives in charge of network news is to worry about the FCC (55). Further, in Lowry's study of network evening newscasts before and after Agnews's speech attacking the networks, the data show changes in the way events were reported. Lowry concluded that while government officials may have no de jure control of TV network news, they may in reality exercise considerable influence (38). Newspapers, on the other hand, are not generally susceptible to the same pressures. Bagdikian reports that the government agencies which collect and report statistics on all industries do not do so for newspapers because they consider the medium "untouchable" (2). The evidence indicates that at the societal level of influence (except on the economic dimension) newspapers are not susceptible to influence while the broadcast industry is highly susceptible to such influences. Occasional government influences on newspapers such as the Failing Newspaper Act and John Kennedy's successful attempt to influence the New York Times in the Bay of Pigs fiasco are well-known exceptions which seem to prove the general rule.

Levels of Analysis: A Research Strategy

Taken together, the taxonomic structure and the question or normative social influence implies that research designs should be capable, if necessary, of incorporating or taking into account different levels of analysis. In attempting to decide in a particular research situation on the necessity of multiple-level designs (i.e., determining whether normative or between-level influence is operating) the following procedure might be followed. For each pair of adjacent levels in the hierarchy it

can be asked whether normative influence operates between levels in such a way that decision-making at the lower level is constrained. This is an empirical question which must be answered on the basis of prior information or evidence concerning the particular set of decisions indicated by the research question and not on a priori grounds. If prior information is absent or insufficient, then the question should be incorporated into the research design.

To oversimplify somewhat, for each pair of adjacent levels in the hierarchy the answer to the question of whether between-level influence operates might be "yes," "no," or "no information." An affirmative answer to the question indicates that the research design and the associated measurement techniques must be constructed to map the flow of influence between levels. The evidence of governmental influence on the broadcast industry, for example, even in areas such as news where it has no legitimate regulatory power indicates that research in broadcast design making should be designed on the strong possibility of the penetration of influence across several levels of analysis. In contrast, since the effect of governmental influence on gatekeeping in newspapers is statistically rare, the societal and industry system level can be considered so nearly independent that research efforts seeking to map between level influence might be better directed toward pairs of adjacent levels lower in the hierarchy.

In the case in which no information is available concerning between-level influence or where the available evidence is scanty, the research strategy becomes more problematic. What is required is a method which enables the analyst to engage in an active search for between-level influences. Unfortunately, the social science literature relevant to

such methods is quite sparse. One obvious reason for the lack of research designs explicitly formulated to deal with multiple levels of analysis is that the social science disciplines have factored the study of human behavior into its component levels. Particular levels of analysis are associated with specific social science disciplines--the cognitive or individual level with psychology, dyads and groups with social psychology and the organizational and societal level with sociology and anthropology. Further, as Paisley (43) has pointed out, particular levels or disciplines are associated with specific methods. Given the fact that inter-disciplinary research is still rare, the division of labor in social research has no doubt inhibited the formulation of methods for dealing with multiple levels of analysis. However, a beginning has been made by Przeworski and Teune (45) in the area of comparative politics and by Richards (46) in his work on communication networks. Their work provides a basis for suggesting a strategy for research in media decision-making.

The design logic which seems most appropriate for dealing with sources of influence at different levels of analysis lies in the difference between two analytic paradigms which Przeworski and Teune contrast as a "most similar systems" design and a "most difficult systems" design. The former design is based on the belief that the "best" samples are composed of systems which are similar on as many attributes as possible. The design logic of the "most similar systems" paradigm is that attributes shared by systems are conceived as being controlled, whereas differences between systems are viewed as being potential explanations. If salient differences between systems emerge from research on similar systems, then the number of factors associated with these differences will be small--

small enough to justify explanations in terms of these differences. Both paradigms can deal with variables at different levels of analysis, but the important difference is that the "most similar systems" design requires an assumption, prior to the research, concerning the system level at which the important influences operate. Once the measurement is carried out, alternative levels cannot be considered.

In contrast, the "most different systems" paradigm does not require an assumption as to which level is most influential but, instead, seeks to answer this question empirically. The "most different systems" design begins by measuring behavior at the most molecular level which is feasible. Generally, this is at the individual level but the measurement could be performed at the level of decision-making groups, organizations, or at other levels indicated by the research question. Instead of assuming that influences stem from more molar levels of analysis, the analysis proceeds on the familiar assumption that a population is homogeneous with respect to the relationship between an independent and a dependent variable <u>at the level at which behavior is actually measured</u>.

This procedure requires that data are collected at some micro-level and the goal is to determine whether relationships are constrained by influences operating at more molar levels. As Richards (46) points out, while it is possible to make inferences about molar levels by aggregating data obtained at more molecular levels, it is not possible to infer what occurs at lower levels from data collected only at the higher levels. The analyst would be making inferences about relationships or properties at a lower level from data describing higher-level relationships or properties. Przeworski and Teune (45) make the same point in a different way--they show how various forms of the ecological fallacy might be

committed if data describing a higher level are used to make inferences concerning levels lower in the system.

Suppose, for purposes of illustration, that a researcher is interested in the relationship of journalist's level of professionalism and the degree of their conformity to organizational news policy. In this case, it is possible to measure these variables at the individual level. Presume that a sampling scheme is devised to select from as many different sub-populations of news industry as possible and that the requisite measurements are performed. If a relationship does exist, the next question concerns whether the relationship is the same for all sub-populations. If the answer to this question is positive, it is possible to form a single general statement of the relationship within the population. As Przeworski and Teune state,

> To the extent that identifying the social system [level of analysis] does not help predict individual characteristics, systemic factors are not important. The total population is homogeneous, and further research is not distinct from investigations customarily conducted within a single social system [level of analysis]. The analysis can proceed at the level of individual characteristics without resorting to any system-level variables. (45:40)

However, if the relationship varies across sub-populations of journalists, then the level of analysis is shifted upward. If, for example, the relationship between professionalism and conformity to policy varies when individual data are aggregated by types of journalistic roles, the level of analysis might be shifted to the organization by aggregating the measures of individuals across types of organizations. If differences are still apparent, comparisons of the measures of individual professionalism and conformity might be aggregated according to whether they were employed by

organizations owned by chains or groups. If differences continue to hold at the next level of analysis--the industry level--it is clear that influences emanating from the most molar or societal level are operating. In this hypothetical example, influences operating between levels result in the relationship between professionalism and conformity to news policy being different for broadcast and print journalists.

It is clear that in the case of many research questions, consideration of possible normative influences on media decision-making will add appreciably to the complexity of the research task especially in those cases in which prior information indicates that normative influence operates or when no prior information is available concerning the levels at which influence operates. This paper has argued, however, that the additional effort is necessary to adequately describe and explain decision-making in the mass media.

REFERENCES

1. Chris Argyris, Behind the Front Page (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).

2. Ben Bagdikian, The Information Machines (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

3. Robert L. Bishop, "The Rush to Chain Ownership," Columbia Journalism Review (November/December, 1972), pp. 10-19.

4. George A. Bailey and Lawrence Lichty, "Rough Justice on A Saigon Street: A Gatekeeper Study of NBC's Tet Execution Film," Journalism Quarterly (Summer, 1972), pp. 221-229, 238.

5. J. G. Blumler, "Producers Attitudes Toward Coverage of an Election Campaign," in Paul Halmos (ed.), "The Sociology of Mass Media Communicators," The Sociological Review: Monograph 13 (The University of Keele: Keele, Staffordshire, 1969).

6. David A. Bowers, "A Report on Activity by Publishers in Directing Newsroom Decisions," Journalism Quarterly (Spring, 1967), pp. 43-52.

7. Broadcast Management, "Drama Shows Next to be Done by ENG Type Equipment," (January, 1977), pp. 62-65.

8. Warren Breed, "Social Control in the Newsroom; A Functional Analysis," Social Forces (May, 1955), pp. 326-335.

9. Les Brown, Television: The Business Behind the Box (New York: Harcourt, Brace-Jovanovich, 1971).

10. James K. Buckalew, "The Radio News Gatekeeper and his Sources," Journalism Quarterly (Winter, 1974), pp. 602-606.

11. Tom Burns, "Public Service and Private World," in Paul Halmos (ed.), "The Sociology of Mass Media Communicators," The Sociological Review: Monograph 13 (The University of Keele: Keele, Staffordshire, 1969).

12. Steve Chibnall, "The Crime Reporter: A Study in the Production of Commercial Knowledge," Sociology (January, 1975), pp. 49-66.

13. Timothy Crouse, The Boys on the Bus (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973).

14. R. M. Cyert and J. G. March, A Behavioral Theory of the Firm (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963).

15. Melvin L. DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach, Theories of Mass Communication (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1975).

16. John Dimmick, "Canons and Codes as Occupational Ideologies," Journal of Communication, (Spring, 1977), pp. 181-187.

17. Joseph R. Dominick and Millard C. Pearce, "Trends in Network Prime-Time Programming, 1953-74," Journal of Communication (Winter, 1976), pp. 70-80.

18. Lewis Donohew, "Publishers and their Influence Groups," Journalism Quarterly (Winter, 1965), pp. 112-113.

19. George A. Donohue, Philip J. Tichenor and Clarice W. Olien, "Gatekeeping: Mass Media Systems and Information Control," in F. Gerald Kline and Philip J. Tichenor (eds.), Current Perspectives in Mass Communication Research (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1972).

20. Delmer D. Dunn, Public Officials and the Press (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969).

21. Alex S. Edelstein and J. Blaine Schulz, "The Leadership Role of the Weekly Newspaper as Seen by Community Leaders: A Sociological Perspective," in Lewis A. Dexter and David Manning White (eds.), People, Society, and Mass Communications (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 221-235.

22. Edward J. Epstein, "The Values of Newsmen," Television Quarterly (Winter, 1973), pp. 9-21.

23. Denby Fawcett, What Happens When A Chain Owner Arrives," Columbia Journalism Review (November-December, 1972), pp. 29-30.

24. Ruth C. Flegel and Steven H. Chaffee, "Influences of Editors, Readers and Personal Opinions on Reporters," Journalism Quarterly (Winter, 1971), pp. 645-651.

25. Johan Galtung, Theory and Methods of Social Research (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).

26. David L. Grey, "Decision-Making by a Reporter Under Deadline Pressure," Journalism Quarterly (Spring, 1967), pp. 419-428.

27. Walter Gieber, "Two Communicators of the News: A Study of the Roles of Sources and Reporters," Social Forces (October, 1960), pp. 76-83.

28. George Gerbner, "An Institutional Approach to Mass Communications Research," in Lee Thayer (ed.), Communication Theory and Research (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publishers, 1967).

29. Paul M. Hirsch, "Processing Fads and Fashions: An Organization-Set Analysis of Cultural Industry Systems," American Journal of Sociology (January, 1972), pp. 639-659.

30. Paul M. Hirsch, "Organizational Analysis and Industrial Sociology: An Instance of Cultural Lag," The American Sociologist (February, 1975), pp. 3-12.

31. Herbert H. Howard, "Cox Broadcasting Corporation: A Group-Ownership Case Study," Journal of Broadcasting (Spring, 1976), pp. 209-231.

32. John W. C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski and William W. Bowman, "The Professional Values of American Newsmen," Public Opinion Quarterly (Winter, 1972-73), pp. 522-540.

33. John W. C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski and William W. Bowman, The News People: A Sociological Portrait of American Journalists and Their Work (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976).

34. Stephen W. King, Communication and Social Influence (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1975).

35. Ervin Laszlo, The Systems View of the World (New York: George Braziiler, 1972).

36. B. H. Liebes, "Decision-Making by Telegraph Editors--AP or UPI?" Journalism Quarterly (Autumn, 1966), pp. 434-442.

37. Jay W. Lorsch and John J. Morse, Organizations and Their Members: A Contingency Approach (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

38. Dennis T. Lowry, "Agnew and the Network TV News: A Before-After Content Analysis," Journalism Quarterly, (Summer, 1971).

39. Maxwell E. McCombs, "Mass Media in the Marketplace," Journalism Monographs, #24 (August, 1972).

40. William N. McPhee, Formal Theories of Mass Behavior (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).

41. Delbert C. Miller, "Town and Gown: The Power Structure of a University Town," American Journal of Sociology (January, 1963), pp. 432-443.

42. Leslie G. Moeller, "Journalism Education, the Media and 'The New Industrial State'," Journalism Quarterly (August, 1968), pp. 496-508.

43. William Paisley, Communication Research as a Behavioral Discipline (Institute for Communication Research, Stanford University, 1972).

44. Richard A. Peterson and David G. Berger, "Cycles in Symbol Production: The Case of the Popular Music Industry," American Sociological Review (April, 1975), pp. 158-170.

45. Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry (New York: Wiley Interscience, 1970).

46. William D. Richards, A Coherent Systems Methodology for the Analysis of Human Communication Systems (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1976).

47. Leon V. Sigal, Reporters and Officials (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath Co., 1973).

48. Herbert A. Simon, The Sciences of the Artificial (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1969).

49. Paul B. Snider, "Mr. Gates Revisited: A 1966 Version of the 1949 Case Study," Journalism Quarterly (Autumn, 1967), pp. 419-427.

50. Guido H. Stempel III, "Effects on Performance of a Cross-Media Monopoly," Journalism Monographs #29 (June, 1973).

51. Ralph R. Thrift, Jr. "How Chain Ownership Affects Editorial Vigor of Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly (Summer, 1977), pp. 327-331.

52. Gaye Tuchman, "Assembling a Network Talk Show," in Gaye Tuchman (ed.) The TV Establishment (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974).

53. Joseph Turow, "Client Relationship and Children's Book Publishing: A Comparative Study of Mass Media Policy in Two Marketplaces," in Paul Hirsch, Peter V. Miller and F. Gerald Kline (eds.), Strategies for Communication Research (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977).

54. Daniel B. Wackman, Donald M. Gillmor, Cecilie Gaziano and Everette E. Dennis, "Chain Newspaper Autonomy as Reflected in Presidential Campaign Endorsements," Journalism Quarterly (Autumn, 1975), pp. 411-420.

55. Malcolm Warner, "TV Coverage of International Affairs," Television Quarterly (Spring, 1968), pp. 60-75.

56. David M. White, "The Gatekeeper: A Case Study in the Selection of News," Journalism Quarterly (Fall, 1950), pp. 383-390.